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1968/01/19

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CITE: MAC 00686 or 00656?
BTG : 151214Z
FROM: GEN WESTMONELAND COMUSMACV
TO : ADM SHARP CIMPAC
GEN WHEELER CJCS

15 JANUARY 1968

DECLASSIFIED

Authority Day 830024
By isv, NARS, Date 5-9-84

1. I DETECT THERE MAY BE SOME MISUNDERSTANDING ABOUT OPERATION EL PASO. THIS EXERCISE IS IN THE CATEGORY OF ADVANCE PLANNING AND INVOLVES AN OPERATION THAT COULD BE CONDUCTED NOT SOONER THAN THE END OF THE NORTHEAST MONSOON SEASON IN LATE FALL OR EARLY ENTER OF THIS YEAR. THE PURPOSE OF THIS EXERCISE IS TO DEVELOP A PLAN, DETERMINE ITS FEASIBILITY, AND REFINER IT BETWEEN NOW AND THE NOVEMBER ELECTIONS SO THAT WE WOULD HAVE A MILITARY PLAN THAT COULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF A POSSIBLE CHANGE IN NATIONAL POLICY. THIS EXERCISE HAS NO IMMEDIACY, BUT I REPORTED IT TO INFORM HIGHER HEADQUARTERS AS A MATTER OF INFORMATION. IT WILL BE SEVERAL WEEKS BEFORE IT IS DEVELOPED TO THE EXTENT THAT IT COULD BE GIVEN ANY MEANINGFUL REVIEW.

2. THE INTELLIGENCE ON ENEMY MOVEMENTS IN QUANG TRI AND THUA THIEN PROVINCES AND THE ADJACENT AREAS OF LAOS AND THE DMZ HAVE PROMPTED ME TO MODIFY CURRENT AND PROJECTED OPERATIONS AND TO INVOKE A CONTINGENCY PLAN. SPECIFICALLY, I HAVE CANCELLED THE PARACHUTE DROP PLANNED AS A PART OF OPERATION SAN ANGELO AND HAVE ORDERED THE RELIEF OF THE 2D BATTALION, 7TH CAVALRY, OF THE 1ST CAVALRY DIVISION AT PHAN THIEP BY THE 3RD BATTALION, 506TH AIRBORNE INFANTRY OF THE 1ST BRIGADE OF THE 181ST AIRBORNE DIVISION, WHICH UNIT WAS TO MAKE THE PARACHUTE DROP. THE 2/7 CAV WILL JOIN ITS PARENT UNIT. THE 1ST CAV DIV HAS BEEN ORDERED TO DEPLOY LESS ONE BRIGADE TO I CORP.

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ONE BRIGADE WILL REMAIN, FOR THE TIME BEING, IN BINH DINH PROVINCE. THE 1ST CAV DIV WILL DEPLOY TO HUE/PHU BAI AND BE JOINED LATER BY ITS REM, NOW WITH THE AMERICAL DIVISION. UNDER THE OP CON OF 3D MAF, THE CAVALRY DIVISION WILL CONDUCT OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS IN CONJUNCTION WITH ARVN AND US MARINE FORCES. MEANWHILE, TWO ADDITIONAL BATTALIONS OF ARVN AIRBORNE TROOPS WILL BE DEPLOYED TO THE CHANG TRI/TNHA THIEN AREA, INCREASING THE VIETNAMESE AIRBORNE TASK FORCE IN THE AREA TO FOUR BATTALIONS. B-52 STRIKES WILL COMMENCE AROUND THE SAME AND IN BASE AREA 161. THE ODDS ARE 60-40 THAT THE ENEMY WILL LAUNCH HIS PLANNED CAMPAIGN PRIOR TO TET. MY OBJECTIVE IS TO PREEMPT THIS ATTACK. THE 1ST CAV DIV SHOULD BE CLOSED AND READY TO GO IN TEN DAYS. BASED ON PREVIOUSLY-DEVELOPED CONTINGENCY PLANS, A LARGE AREA FOR HELICOPTER MAINTENANCE WAS FINISHED TODAY, AND LOGISTIC ARRANGEMENTS TO SUPPORT THE 1ST CAV DIV IN ITS NEW AREA OF DEPLOYMENT ARE ALMOST COMPLETED.

3. I AM ACCEPTING A CALCULATED RISK IN II CORPS AREA BUT BELIEVE THAT THE BRIGADE OF THE 1ST CAV DIV LEFT BEHIND AND SOME REEMPLOYMENT OF THE 173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE WILL MAKE THIS ACCEPTABLE. HOWEVER, A CONTINGENCY PLAN HAS BEEN DEVELOPED TO MOVE A BRIGADE OF THE 101ST ABN DIV FROM II FORCE TO I FORCE IF REQUIRED. MEANWHILE, WE STILL HAVE SUFFICIENT STRENGTH IN III CORPS TO CONTINUE OPERATIONS GENERALLY AS PLANNED.